

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



Palmer House Hotel

17 E. Monroe St.

**Preliminary Landmark recommendation approved by the
Commission on Chicago Landmarks, April 7, 2005**



CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Lori T. Healey, Commissioner

Palmer House Hotel

(now Palmer House Hilton)
17 East Monroe Street

Built 1925-27
Architects Holabird & Roche

Located in Chicago's Loop and occupying most of a city block, the Palmer House Hotel (now the Palmer House Hilton) remains one of the flagship hotels in Chicago. Built in the 1920s, the Palmer House is the fourth hotel (after earlier incarnations built in 1870, 1871, and 1875) to bear the name of real estate magnate and hotelier Potter Palmer. The hotel is an excellent example of an early 20th-century convention hotel, with a finely crafted Classical Revival-style exterior and a series of handsome interior public spaces that reflect the importance of such large-scale hotels in the economic and social life of Chicago. It was designed by Holabird and Roche, one of Chicago's most important architectural firms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and reflects in its intricate overall planning and luxurious Classical detailing the French Beaux-Arts training of John Holabird and John Wellborn Root, Jr., the designers of the hotel.

There has been a Palmer House Hotel in Chicago since the years before the Chicago Fire of 1871, the vision of Potter Palmer and his family. Palmer, who began his fortune as a Lake Street dry goods merchant in pre-Civil War Chicago, transformed Chicago retailing through his vision of State Street as a wide thoroughfare lined with elegant shops and commercial. As the highlight of his State Street holdings, Palmer built two Palmer House Hotels, at State and Quincy and State and Monroe, that were destroyed in the Fire. The third Palmer House Hotel,

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The landmark designation process begins with a staff study and a preliminary summary of information related to the potential designation criteria. The next step is a preliminary vote by the landmarks commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until a final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance adopted by the City Council should be regarded as final.

rebuilt in 1875 at State and Monroe, was for 50 years an important social center for Chicagoans and visitors alike. The fourth and current Palmer House Hotel was built by Palmer's sons, Honore and Potter Jr., as a grandly-scaled continuation of the Palmer House tradition. The hotel retains significant interior spaces including its second-floor reception lobby and Empire Room and two fourth-floor ballrooms, the Red Lacquer Room and Grand Ballroom.

Palmer and his wife, Bertha Honore Palmer, also were significant figures in the creation of Lake Shore Drive and the Gold Coast neighborhood as the premier neighborhood for Chicago's elite families. After Palmer's death in 1902, Bertha Palmer, who was one of the City's most influential society matrons, continued to manage the family's real estate holdings, doubling the Palmer Estate's value to more than \$16 million dollars before her death in 1918.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE PALMER HOUSE HOTELS

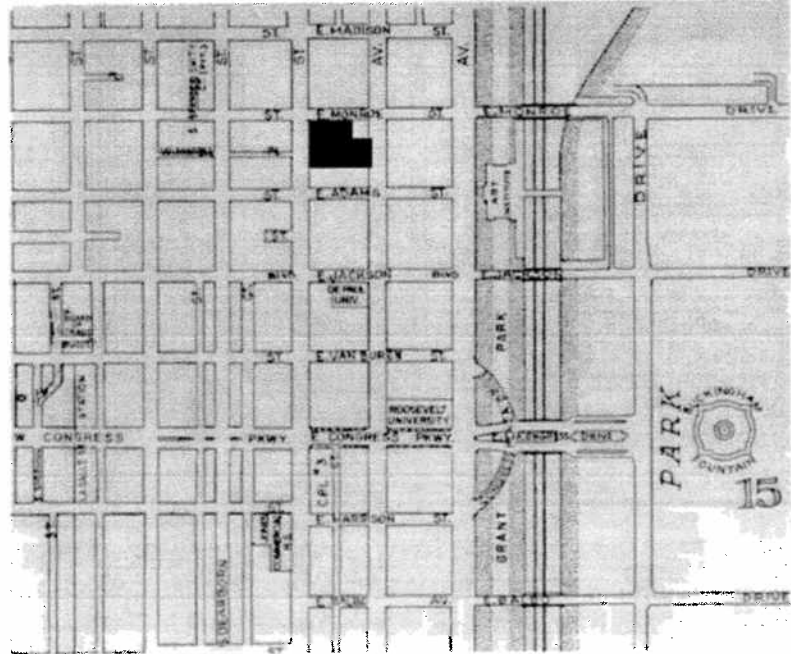
The current Palmer House Hotel is the fourth building bearing that name and is one of the leading heirs to a fabled history of fine hotels in Chicago. Owned by then up-and-coming Chicago businessman and land speculator Potter Palmer, the first Palmer House, located at State and Quincy, opened in September 1870 with 225 rooms. It was designed by John Van Osdel, considered Chicago's first professional architect. The second Palmer House, located at the more prominent intersection of State and Monroe, and also designed by Van Osdel, was in construction in October 1871 when the Chicago Fire destroyed both the first and second Palmer Houses. (It is said that Van Osdel saved his architectural record books, now part of the research collection at the Chicago Historical Society, by burying them in sand in the new Palmer House's basement.)

Palmer quickly rebuilt the destroyed hotel at State and Monroe, employing calcium lights and gas fires so workers could continue building at night. Costing \$13 million, the resulting seven-story hotel, the third with its name, was a leading Chicago hotel from its opening in 1875 to its later replacement by the current hotel. Designed by Van Osdel and filled with Italian marble and rare mosaics, it was so ornate that it was alternatively mocked and praised. Chicago's early chronicler, A.T. Andreas, said that this third Palmer House was built on a "scale of magnificence and completeness unparalleled in Western hotel history." The lavish new building covered 76,550 square feet of ground and had 850 rooms, housing approximately 1,000 guests. The total cost of the new Palmer House was more than \$3.5 million, including \$1 million for land, \$2 million for the building itself, and \$500,000 for furnishings.

In a city that prided itself on grand hotels, including the Great Northern and Tremont hotels, the third Palmer House was the first hotel in Chicago to be equipped with electric lights, telephones and elevators, and was unmatched in its opulence when it opened. Traveler and lecturer Captain Willard Glazier described the new hotel (as quoted by Harold Mayer and Richard C. Wade in *Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis*),



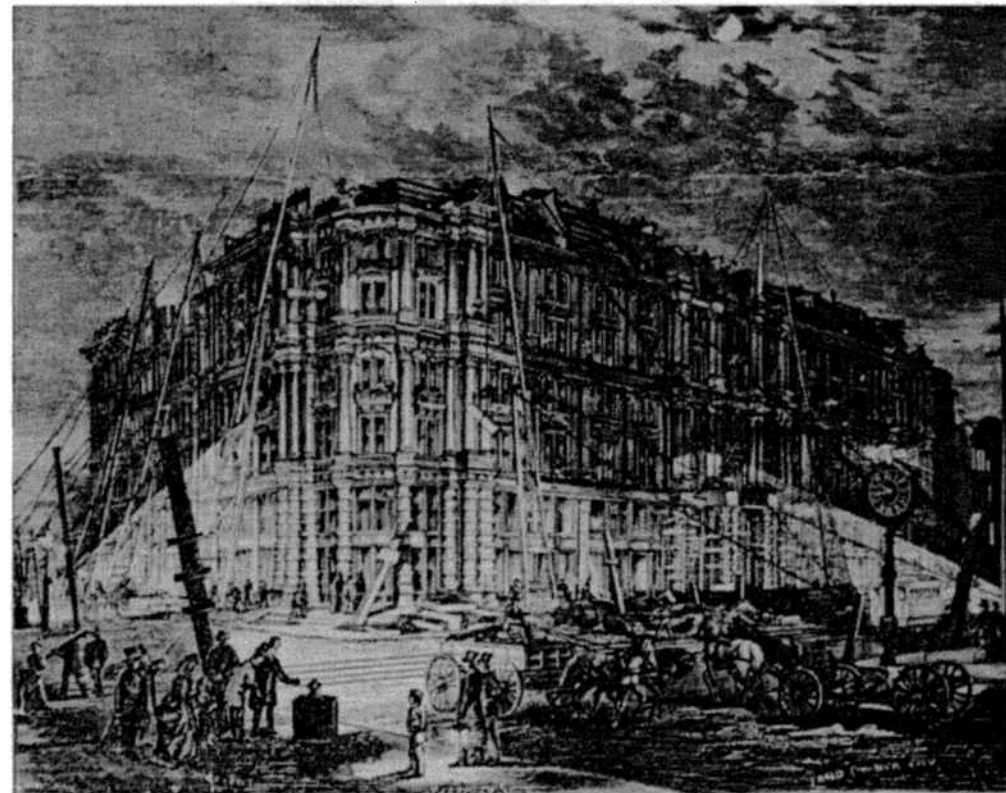
Above: The Palmer House Hotel is a 25-story hotel built between 1925 and 1927.



Left: It is located on the block bounded by State, Monroe, Wabash, and Adams in Chicago's Loop.

There have been four Palmer House Hotels in Chicago. Right: The first Palmer House was built in 1870 at the northwest corner of State and Quincy. The architect was John M. Van Osdel.

Bottom: The second Palmer House, at the southwest corner of State and Monroe, was destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871. This illustration shows its successor building (the third Palmer House) being constructed at night on the same site.



Top: The third Palmer House Hotel, when finished in 1875, was one of Chicago's grandest hotels. Bottom: A view of the hotel's reception lobby.

This building is said to contain more bricks than any two hotels on the Continent, and more iron than most of them put together. The flooring contains ninety thousand square feet of marble tiling laid in massive beds of cement . . . the magnificent office is . . . wainscoted with Italian marble, studded with many natural mosaics of rare and curious beauty. The wainscoting of the counter is made of the same exquisite materials. The grand stair case is made of the same.

British writer and adventurer Rudyard Kipling was less impressed by Chicagoans' boasts, calling the hotel simply "a gilded and mirrored rabbit warren" with a "huge hall of tessellated marble, crammed with people talking about money and spitting about everything."

The hotel was also famous for its barbershop, where the floor was inlaid with silver dollars. A *Chicago Tribune* article noted:

When the hotel was opened in 1873 the barbershop concession was under the management of Col. W. S. Wooden. He decorated the floor of his shop with American dollars. Three years later, in 1876 the federal government passed a law which prohibited such use of the coinage. The American dollars were then pried out and were replaced with Mexican dollars. After these coins had been worn smooth, they were replaced with a fresh collection, also Mexican. Years later (no date given) the silver dollar flooring was replaced with tile.

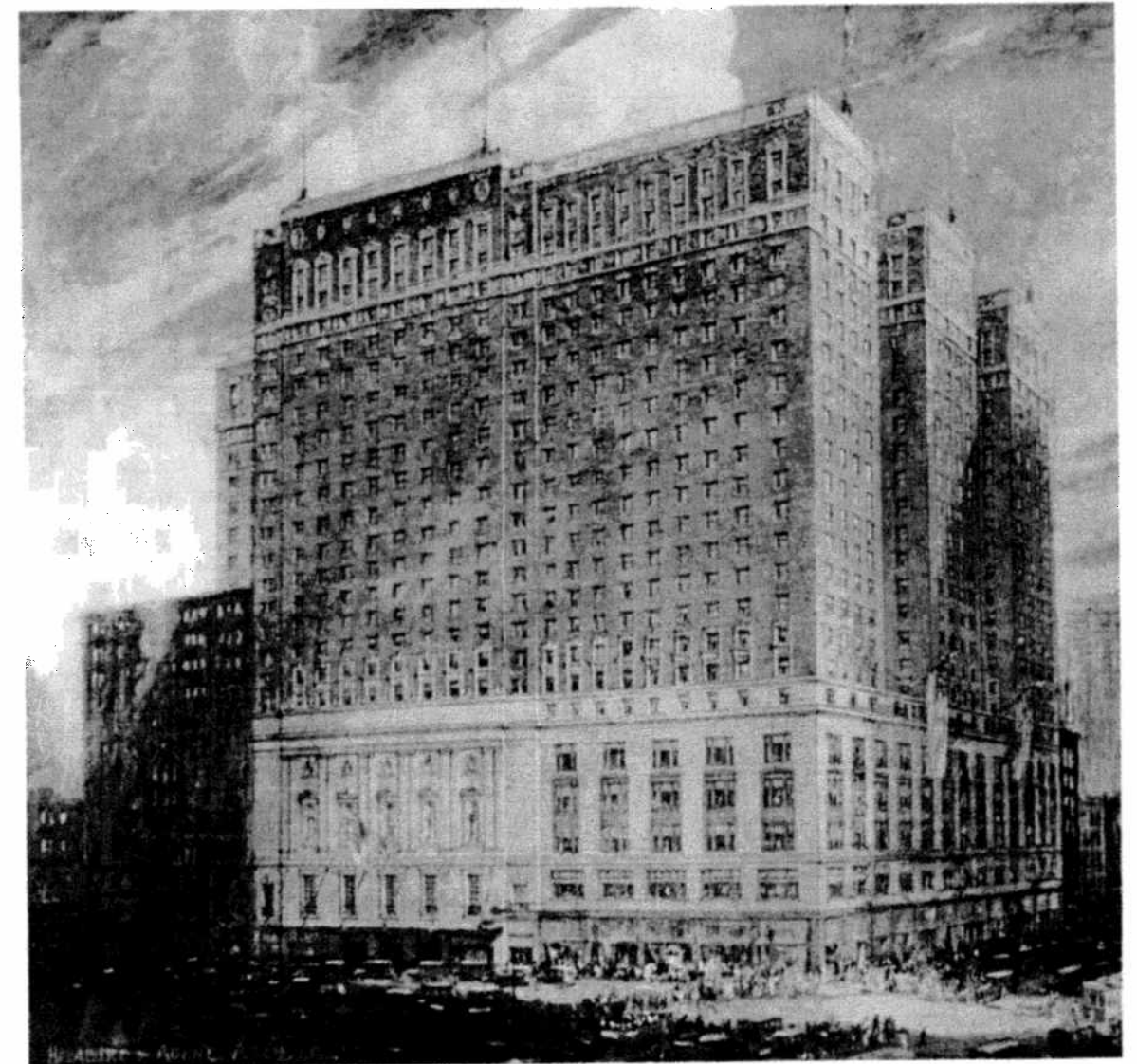
These silver dollars were so well known that when the cornerstone of the current Palmer House was laid on June 8, 1925, Potter Palmer Jr. included one of these silver dollars, then "worn to a thickness of a dime," in the cornerstone cavity.

Although the third Palmer House Hotel had been carefully maintained and remained profitable throughout its existence, by 1919 it was clear to the Palmer Estate that Chicago could support a much larger hotel. Holabird and Roche, one of Chicago's leading architectural firms, was commissioned by Potter Palmer's heirs, his sons Honore and Potter Jr., to prepare plans for a new hotel building. John Wellborn Root, Jr., one of the firm's partners, designed a brick-and-limestone-clad, steel-frame hotel that would cover much of the block bounded by State, Monroe, Wabash and Adams and have grandly-scaled interiors in the tradition of the Palmer House being replaced.

Construction of the new Palmer House Hotel took place in stages in order for hotel business to continue to be conducted in the old building. The first stage built was the eastern portion of the new building, east of the existing hotel building along Monroe and Wabash. Then, after this new section was open to business, the old hotel was razed for the construction of the rest of the new structure.

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND DESCRIPTION

When the Palmer House Hotel was rebuilt in the 1920s, Chicago was America's second city, rivaled only by New York. It was the epicenter of United States passenger and freight rail traffic, a major center of manufacturing, commodities sales and shipping, and retail commerce, and one of the nation's leading convention cities. All of these factors led to several important hotels being constructed in Chicago during the decade, including the Drake, the Stevens (now



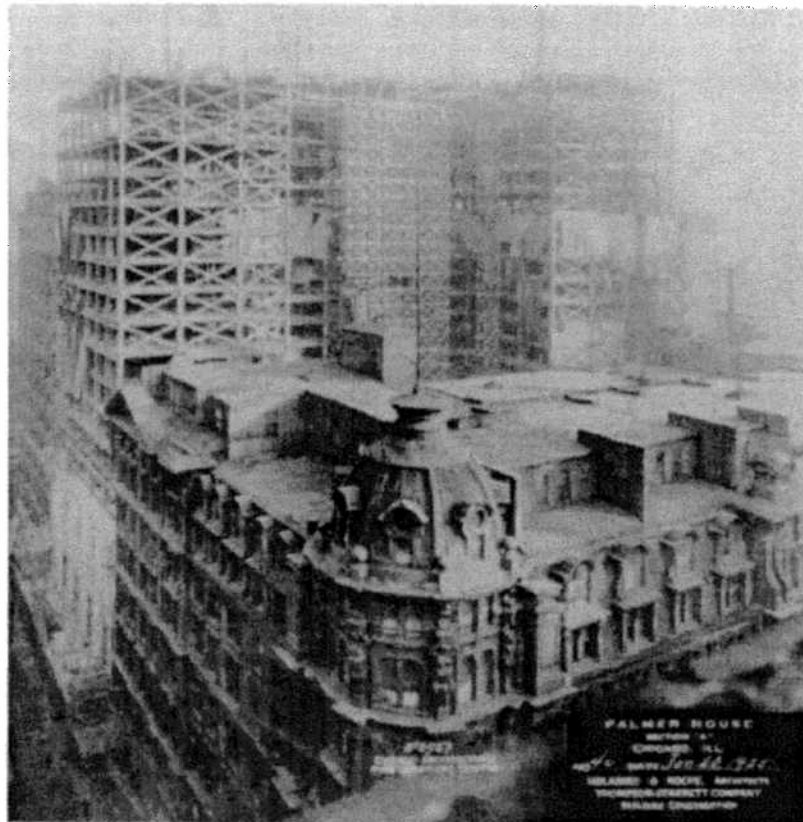
A rendering of the fourth (and current) Palmer House Hotel.

The fourth (and current) Palmer House was built in two stages to allow for uninterrupted service. The first section, along Wabash, was built first, behind the third Palmer House at State and Monroe. Then the older building was demolished and the second section, along State, was constructed.

Right: A view of the first section under construction. The building in the foreground is the third Palmer House.

Bottom left: A view, from Wabash and Monroe, of the finished first section. (The building in the foreground is the Goddard Building.)

Bottom right: The completed hotel.



the Chicago Hilton and Towers), Bismarck (now the Hotel Allegro), and additions to the Sherman House and Morrison hotels (both now demolished). The new Palmer House Hotel was part of that general boom.

It was conceived as a gigantic structure, a city under one roof, with more than 2,000 guest rooms and shopping, dining, and meeting space spread over five floors. It was briefly the largest hotel in the world, superseded by another Chicago hotel, the Stevens, which opened soon after. In the December 1929 *Architectural Forum*, John Wellborn Root, Jr., the designer of the Palmer House Hotel, described both the magnificent scale and features of the new hotel, writing that:

the Palmer House combined in one structure, a hotel consisting of 2,350 bedrooms and extensive public rooms, and a mercantile building with 250,000 square feet of renting area distributed over the whole ground floor and over four additional floors on the principal retail street of the city.

The Palmer House Hotel is a 25-story steel-frame building, clad on the lower six floors by gray Bedford limestone and on upper stories by red brick. A massive presence along State Street, Monroe Street and Wabash Avenue, it was designed in the Classical Revival style, utilizing 18th-century French Neoclassical precedents for exterior ornamentation. The hotel has three principal entrances, one facing Monroe that opens onto the hotel's first-floor shopping arcade and staircase to the hotel's main second-floor lobby, and entrances on State and Wabash that also provide access to the hotel's first-floor shopping arcade. All three hotel entrances have bronze canopies, finely detailed with French Neoclassical ornament. The rest of the building's first floor is taken up by storefronts for a variety of retailers. Most of these storefronts have been remodeled over time; a striking exception is the storefront formerly occupied by C.D. Peacock, one of Chicago's oldest and most exclusive jewelers, with its black marble-and-bronze, Classically-detailed storefront surrounds and bronze peacock-embellished entrances which have survived almost entirely intact. Other black-and-bronze-colored storefront surrounds also remain as part of storefronts facing Wabash.

Above the ground floor, the limestone-clad base is given architectural focus over the Monroe entrance with a grid of classical pilasters and pedimented niches with urns based on French Neoclassical architecture. The rest of the base, which houses public facilities such as the hotel reception lobby, dining and meeting rooms, and ballrooms, is articulated with a regular composition of windows, some accented with niches, set within smooth limestone walls.

Upper floors are clad with red brick and punctuated with individual, double-hung windows, creating a grid generally without horizontal or vertical emphasis that visually identifies the hotel's guest room floors. The top two floors are articulated somewhat more emphatically with single windows on both floors grouped in vertical units, surrounded by projecting limestone surrounds and topped by pediments.



The Palmer House Hotel is a fine example of a large-scale urban hotel designed in the Classical Revival style. Its exterior has a limestone-clad podium decorated with French Neoclassical ornament, including paired pilasters and niches with boldly-sculpted urns.



Left and middle: The entrance canopies of the Palmer House Hotel have bronze Classical-style ornament.



Although most of the hotel's exterior storefronts have been altered over time, several storefronts retain historic detailing. Left and middle bottom: The former C.D. Peacock jewelers storefront (now Ultra Jewelers) retains almost all of its historic storefront features, including bronze door surrounds and a corner clock, both decorated with peacocks. Bottom right: Several Wabash Avenue storefronts retain black-and-bronze storefront surrounds with Classical Revival-style ornament.

In his *Architectural Forum* article on the hotel, architect Root noted the special demands of designing the exterior of such a large and spatially complicated building. Concerning the exterior, he wrote:

here is consequently little justification of elaborate exterior treatment. Design was necessarily limited to merely clothing of the plan . . . tiers of broad windows marking the shop spaces, the arches proclaiming the dining rooms, the band of decorative limestone niches marking the ball room from which for many reasons it was deemed advisable to eliminate all outside light. The transition from stone to brick at the fifth floor following the change in plan from the shops and public rooms to the guest rooms, the recalling of stone upward around the windows at the ends of the wing where the suites occur in plan. The general character of the comparatively simple detail where it occurs is inspired from that of the French Empire.

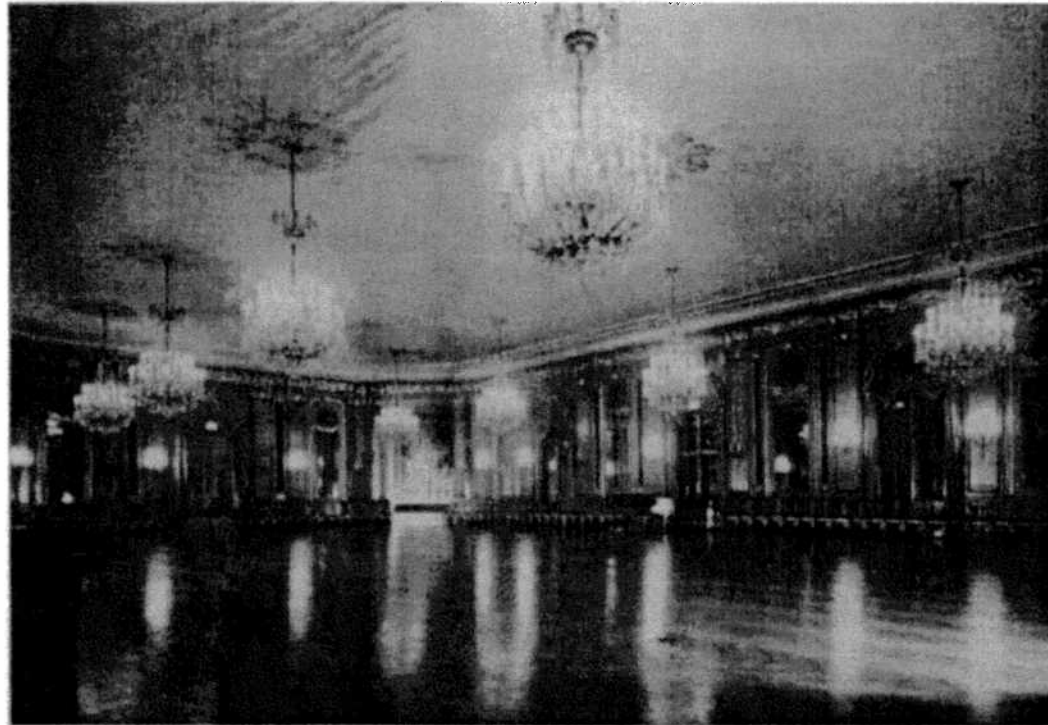
The hotel has a number of significant interior spaces. A travertine marble-clad double staircase leads from the Monroe entrance lobby to a palatial second-floor reception lobby, conceived as a grandly-scaled European drawing room, which arguably remains one of the finest public interior spaces in Chicago. Root described the lobby as “most impressive . . . with its walls clad in beige and green marble, light sconces finely cast in bronze, and an impressive ceiling ornamented with paintings and other decorations in a refined Neoclassical style.” The space is two stories in height, with travertine-clad piers rising to a ceiling lavishly decorated with Classical-style allegorical figures set within an intricate pattern of geometric panels ornamented with swirling foliate ornament and Classical-style moldings. Bronze light sconces light the lobby. Openings between the piers open onto circulation corridors that encircle the room on three sides on both the second and third (mezzanine) floors. Additions and changes that have been made to the lobby since its opening include furniture, a modernized reception desk beyond the circulation corridor on the east side of the lobby, and retail display cases and escalators on the south side of the lobby.

Opening off the lobby, up a short flight of stairs flanked by handsome Classical-style torchieres, is the Empire Room, built as the hotel’s main dining room and used from 1932 to 1976 as a night club with big-name entertainers. The room is an expansive one, with walls defined by paired pilasters setting off gilded plaster panels ornamented with Classical-style moldings. Lavishly detailed wall sconces and chandeliers light the room. Root described the space as ornamented with “flat ebony pilasters against dark green walls and softly tapestried panels, the whole lightened by gold leaf in the decoration of trim, of capitals, and cornice and ceiling.” Since its closing as a nightclub in 1976, the space has been used for conferences and meetings.

The fourth floor of the hotel contains two large ballrooms that Root designed with finely-crafted Classical ornament. The Grand Ballroom is painted in cream and gold and has a small balcony that rings the room, while the Red Lacquer Room, in contrast, is bright red. Root wrote that the Grand Ballroom “displays the restrained and monumental character of the period of Louis XVI,” while the Red Lacquer Room “hints at rococo, its walls are red lacquer and gold relieved by mirrors.” Both retain original lighting fixtures. M. J. Straus, a reporter for the *Chicago Evening Post*, noted that the hotel’s ballrooms had floors supported by thousands of coiled



The Palmer House Hotel has several noteworthy public interior spaces. Top: The second-floor hotel reception lobby as seen in a recent photo. Bottom: A historic photo of the Empire Room, originally the hotel’s main dining room and for many years a premier Chicago nightclub.



steel springs to give an extra bounce to dancers. (The original grandly-scaled and domed foyer for the Grand Ballroom has been remodeled and converted into the separate State Ballroom.)

Also of significance is the retail store formerly occupied by C. D. Peacock jewelers at the southeast corner of State and Monroe Streets. The exterior of the store has low-relief Classical-style bronze ornament atop black marble storefront surrounds. A bronze clock detailed with peacocks ornaments the storefront corner next to the Peacock store entrance on State, which has finely-cast bronze doors also detailed with peacocks. A secondary entrance on Monroe has similar doors. Inside, the store retains walls richly appointed with green Verde Antico marble, bronze-colored metal work, and an elaborate coffered ceiling.

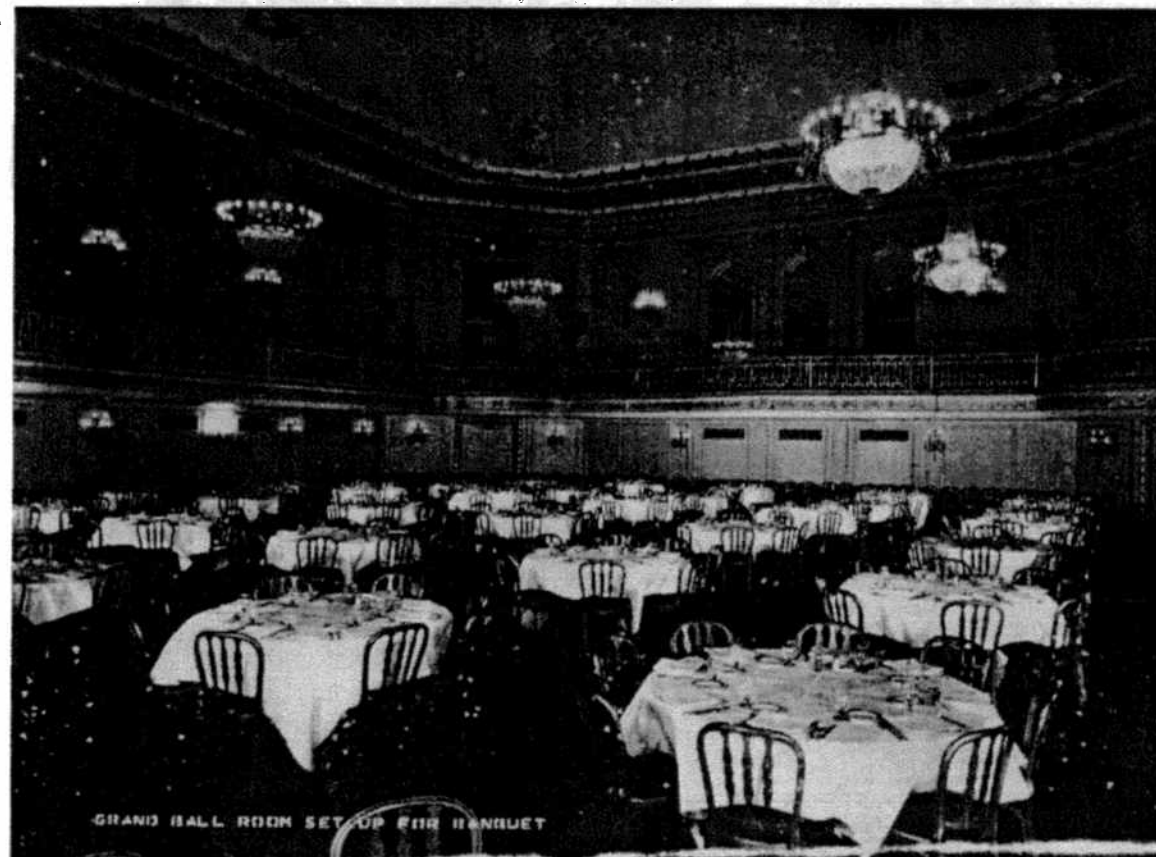
When the first section of the current Palmer House Hotel opened in December 1925, the first guest to sign the new register was Honore Palmer, the son of Potter and Bertha Palmer. Afterwards, a steady stream of visitors and guests swarmed the new hotel with its grand spaces, including the two-story reception lobby and the Empire Room. (Both had temporary west walls until the older Palmer House was demolished in 1926 and the second construction phase of the current building commenced.) As Straus, reporting for the *Chicago Evening Post*, noted:

The city's life flowed into the great towering modern tavern in the block south of Monroe street between State and Wabash, with the startling bustle of the metropolis of 1925, and as usual Chicago lived up to its latest boast. Flowers filled the huge lobby when the doors which have no key were thrown open for the first time this morning. Thousands came to look and wonder and hundreds came to stay.

The new opulent hotel was not appreciated by everyone. A number of long-time occupants of the former Palmer House Hotel had to coaxed, and in a few cases threatened with the cut-off of utilities, before they would move from their rooms in the 50-year-old hotel to the new. Straus quoted a Mr. Rutt, 83 years of age, who stated that he had lived at the old Palmer House since the 1870s. He went on:

It was the best there was then and today it is good enough for me. Potter Palmer ran it then and I helped him raise the money to build it. Of course, it made money because Chicago needed hotels then—you wouldn't know, but it was shortly after the fire. . . . I paid \$5 for a great big room, four times as big as this one [in the new Palmer House], and all I could eat. I was young then and I guess I ate five meals a day. Potter used to tell me to eat myself into the grave if I wanted to. He didn't care. . . . Last night they moved me over here. It's pretty fine all right here with everything new, but you should have seen the old place.

The Palmer House Hotel was bought in 1945 from the Palmer Estate by hotel magnate Conrad Hilton. It currently has 1,639 rooms, 127,000 square feet of meeting space, 59,000 square feet of retail space, and 52,000 square feet of office space.



The hotel's fourth floor has two historic ballrooms, both seen here in historic photos. Top: The Red Lacquer Room. Bottom: The Grand Ballroom.

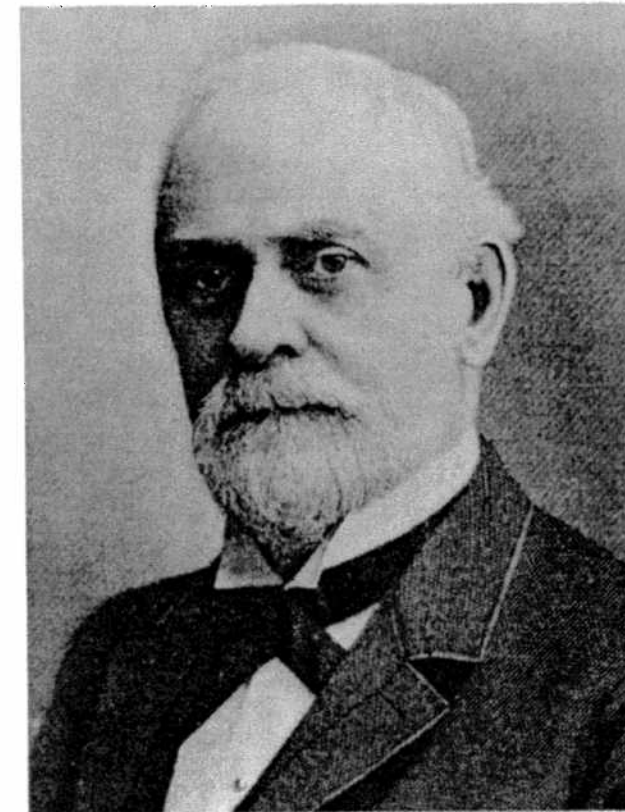
POTTER PALMER, BERTHA HONORE PALMER AND THEIR FAMILY

The history of the Palmer House Hotel as one of Chicago's great hotels, as well as the rise of State Street as "that Great Street," is inextricably tied to Potter Palmer, one of Chicago's most significant businessmen, his wife Bertha, and their sons Honore and Potter Jr. Together, the Palmer family guided the hotel through its various physical incarnations for more than 70 years. The Palmers were not the wealthiest family in Chicago during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but through their real estate and civic involvements, they were arguably one of the most prominent and influential.

Potter Palmer (1826-1902) started out as a wholesaler and retailer on Lake Street, then Chicago's primary commercial street, in the 1850's and made his fortune during the Civil War speculating in cotton. On the advice of his doctors, he retired from the retail trade in 1865 at only forty years old, and left for an extended tour of Europe. Before his departure, he sold his dry goods business to Marshall Field and Levi Z. Leiter, whose dry goods store was the forerunner of the Marshall Field and Co. department store.

Upon his return to Chicago in 1867, Palmer began the first of his bold real estate investments by purchasing over three-quarters of a mile of real estate on both sides of State Street, from Lake Street south. His vision was to widen the street and create a grand thoroughfare that would become the most important retail street in Chicago, and by extension, one of the most significant in America. He envisioned a street lined with tall buildings, quality shops and a grand hotel of his own—to be known as the Palmer House. He managed to persuade dry-goods merchant Field, Leiter and Company to move from Lake to State by building for them a new and opulent store. One contemporary observer thought the movement of retailing to State Street so important and far-reaching that he called Palmer's works the "Haussamanizing of State Street," likening it to the rebuilding of Paris by Baron Georges Eugene Haussman under Napoleon III.

By 1869, thirty to forty masonry buildings had sprung up along the considerably improved State Street. The effects of these decisions were felt throughout the business community, and the shift to State Street as the City's retail spine was sudden and dramatic. The destruction of Palmer's first two Palmer Houses in the Chicago Fire of 1871, along with Palmer's other buildings, only momentarily slowed the entrepreneur. His new (and third) Palmer House was completed in 1875 and viewed as the toast of the town for traveling businessmen and wealthy families, including Palmer himself, who at first felt hotel living provided the right setting for his opulent lifestyle. Hotel living in the 19th and early 20th centuries was a common occurrence. Before the development of luxury apartment buildings, wealthy families and individuals had no socially respectable alternative to mansion living other than fine hotels. Even after apartment living became commonplace, hotel living remained popular among individuals, both men and women, who enjoyed the services supplied by hotels, including meals.



Left: Potter Palmer was one of Chicago's most important businessmen, real estate developers, and hotel owners.

Bottom: A view of State Street, circa late 1860s. Palmer was "the father of State Street." He bought several blocks of land along State in the 1860s and, and through his building development and promotion, persuaded Chicago merchants to abandon Lake Street, then the established commercial street in Chicago, for State. He envisioned his various Palmer House hotels as linchpins of this development.



Soon though, Palmer and his young wife Bertha decided that a new mansion was needed to solidify their social position. Palmer is credited with advancing Lake Shore Drive and, by extension, the "Gold Coast" as a fashionable neighborhood in the 1880s and 90s. Although well-to-do families, such as the extended McCormick family (of reaper fame) and early mayor William H. Ogden, had long lived on the Near North Side, the most elite Chicago neighborhoods had been on the Near South Side, centered on Prairie Avenue, and the Near West Side along Washington Boulevard and Ashland Avenue. Potter saw the potential attractiveness of the lakefront land north of downtown; although low-lying and barren, the lakeshore there had not been taken over by railroads as it had been on the South Side. He bought and reclaimed swampland adjacent to the lake and pumped tons of sand onto the shore to create buildable lots. There, on Lake Shore Drive, he built a home, commonly known as "the Castle," that was widely believed to be the most expensive house built in Chicago when it was completed in 1882. Architect and historian Thomas Tallmadge called it "the mansion to end all mansions."

In addition, Palmer built speculative houses along neighboring streets such as Astor that were smaller than his own palatial mansion, but still handsome and fashionable in style. (Several of these houses, built in 1889, remain standing today at 1316-22 N. Astor St. and 25 E. Banks St. in the Astor Street Chicago Landmark District.) Such building speculation served to reinforce the realignment of the Near North Side as the neighborhood of choice for wealthy Chicagoans.

By being among the earliest members of their social set to build in the Gold Coast, the Palmers helped create a fundamental shift in fashionable neighborhoods from the South Side to the North Side. Such a shift, from Prairie Avenue to Lake Shore Drive and Astor Street, paralleled what Palmer had accomplished twenty years earlier by shifting Chicago's major retail establishments from Lake Street to State Street.

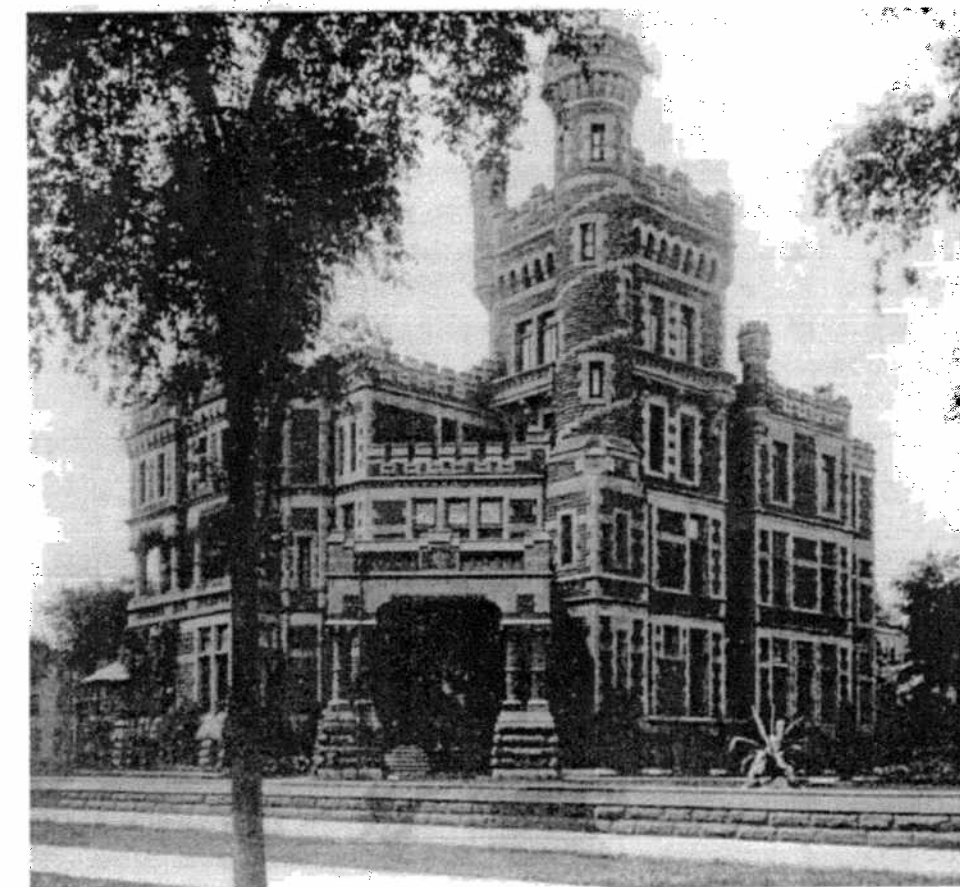
Bertha Palmer (1850-1918) was born Bertha Honore in Louisville, Kentucky. She descended on her father's side from an old and distinguished French family and on her mother's from an old Maryland family. The Honore family moved to Chicago when Bertha's father, Henry Honore, came to do business in the rapidly growing city. The Honores lived on then-fashionable Ashland Avenue as part of a small colony of wealthy Kentucky expatriates, and young Bertha was subsequently introduced to Chicago society. She met, and was courted by, the much older Potter Palmer, and the couple was married in 1871 just before the Chicago Fire swept away much of Palmer's extensive real-estate holdings.

Palmer's success in the years following the Fire can be traced to both his business acumen and Bertha's social ambition. Upon her marriage, Bertha Palmer half-jokingly had referred to herself as "an innkeeper's wife," but the Palmers became dominant figures in Chicago society during the late 19th century. Their mansion on Lake Shore Drive was conceived by Bertha as a showplace, and both Chicagoans and visitors marveled at its extraordinary castellated appearance on the shores of Lake Michigan. Inside, the house was extravagantly detailed and furnished with only the best furniture and art, including then-avant-garde French Impressionist



Left: Bertha Honore Palmer was the long-time head of Chicago society and an astute businesswoman in her own right, managing the Palmer fortune after her husband's death in 1902.

Bottom: The Palmer "castle" on Lake Shore Drive was a showplace for Potter's wealth and Bertha's taste, and was a center of elite social gatherings throughout Bertha's life.



paintings. (A telling anecdote detailing Bertha's rather aristocratic view of herself concerns the mansion's exterior front door. Bertha decreed that it would have no exterior handle, since there would always be servants inside to open the door.)

Increasingly a "grand dame," Bertha rose steadily to the heights of social influence until she was elected as the President of the Board of Lady Managers of the World's Colombian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893 and the most prestigious and wide-ranging event yet held in the still-young city. As the leading woman associated with the fair, she ruled her committee with an iron fist and used all of her influence to insure that the Women's Building was a spectacular sight. Bertha also served as an unofficial society hostess to fair dignitaries, hosting many parties at the Palmers' mansion.

In many ways Mrs. Palmer eclipsed her own husband in the social swirl of late 19th century Chicago. Involved in charities and liberal social causes throughout her life, Mrs. Palmer held a grip on Chicago society for more than forty years by holding the annual year-end Charity Ball at the Palmers' "castle."

When Potter (who had been 24 years Bertha's senior) died in 1902, Bertha was given one-half of the estate outright, while the remainder was held in trust under her supervision for the Palmers' sons Honore and Potter Jr., to be disbursed to them upon her death. She subsequently played a large part in the management of her husband's estate, including his large real estate holdings. Besides being astute socially, Bertha proved a savvy businesswoman on her own, and was able to double the value of the Palmer Estate, which was valued at almost \$16 million by the time of her own death in 1918.

Honore Palmer and Potter Palmer, Jr. at that time inherited the entire Palmer fortune, including the Palmer House Hotel. Both were involved in the Palmer Estate's real-estate holdings in Chicago and Sarasota, Florida, where Bertha had purchased a large tract of land for development in 1910 and which had become a fashionable winter resort favored by many in Chicago society. Potter Jr. died in 1943, leaving an estate valued at close to \$100 million. His death may have led to the decision to sell the Palmer House Hotel to Conrad Hilton two years later. Honore Palmer lived until 1964, dying at the ripe age of 90.

THE CLASSICAL REVIVAL STYLE

The Palmer House Hotel was designed by architects Holabird and Roche as a Classical Revival-style building. The use and adaptation of a long-standing historic architectural style to such a modern and spatially complex building is consistent with how Americans in general, and Chicagoans in particular, saw architectural design in the 1920s. With a few exceptions, such as the clients of progressive American architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright or European-trained architects such as Rudolf Schindler and Richard Neutra, most Americans wanted buildings that were modern and up-to-date in function, but

were designed using traditional architectural styles. In that context, the Classical Revival architectural style remained an important part of American cultural life.

The Classical tradition in architecture and design is one of the oldest and most significant traditions in Western civilization, influential from its origins in the Greek city-states of the 6th century BC through the present day. The architecture of ancient Greek temples and sacred buildings was widely admired by other Mediterranean cultures, including ancient Rome, which incorporated Greek Classical architectural forms and details in its buildings throughout its empire, which encompassed regions as far flung as England, North Africa, Spain, and Persia.

The effort to keep Classical architecture as a living architecture was an important part of the Italian Renaissance, when architects sought to revive Classicism through a melding of ancient Roman Classical forms with contemporary building types, including palaces and churches. This effort to keep Classical architecture alive continued through the Baroque era of the 17th century, the Rococo and Neoclassical periods of the 18th and early 19th centuries, and the Greek Revival, Renaissance Revival and Classical Revival periods of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Classical design was seen as a significant aspect of Western civilization, and buildings intended to house important cultural, economic, or social institutions, whether public or private, often utilized Classical forms and ornament as part of their designs. By the early 1900s, the Classical style was increasingly adapted to a wide variety of building types, including banks, university buildings, railroad stations, and large hotels, that had developed as large-scale, densely-populated cities had grown through industrialization and migration.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, architects in both Europe and America increasingly learned their professions in architecture schools. The most prominent ones, including the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, taught students how to design complex modern buildings while cloaking them in historic architectural styles, especially Classicism. Both John Holabird and John Wellborn Root, Jr., the architects associated with the Palmer House design, attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and both absorbed the Ecole's teachings, which focused on the combination of modern planning and historic form as the basis of architectural design.

HOTELS IN CHICAGO

Hotels in the frontier town of Chicago began as rather crudely built taverns and inns, such as the Sauganash Inn, built by Mark Beaubien in 1831. The first hotel of note was perhaps the Tremont House of 1833. Like that of the later Palmer House, the Tremont House name developed such cachet among 19th-century Chicagoans that three later Tremont House hotels were built in Chicago, the last after the Fire of 1871. The third Tremont House, built in 1850,

was arguably the City's finest in the 1850s and 60s; both Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas spoke from its balconies to crowds during their campaigns for the presidency in 1860.

By the time that the Fire of 1871 swept clean downtown Chicago, the leading luxury hotels in Chicago included the Tremont House (located at Dearborn and Lake), the Grand Pacific (bounded by Clark, Quincy, LaSalle, and Jackson), the Sherman House (at Clark and Randolph), and the Palmer House. All of these were built in grander style after the Fire. Several large hotels were built in anticipation of the World's Columbian Exposition, the most important being the Auditorium, housed within an enormous building on Michigan Avenue that housed offices and an opera house as well as the 400-room hotel.

The LaSalle Hotel (1908-9, demolished) and the Blackstone Hotel (1910, a designated Chicago Landmark) were completed in the decade before the fourth Palmer House was begun. Already existing hotels such as the Sherman House and Morrison Hotel also received major additions. On North Michigan Avenue, the Drake Hotel (1918-20) and the Allerton Hotel (1923-4) offered views of the lake and quiet elegance north of the Loop near the Gold Coast. Elsewhere in Chicago, hotels were built in lakefront neighborhoods both north and south of downtown, especially in Hyde Park on the South Side and Edgewater on the Far North Side, where the water's-edge Edgewater Beach Hotel (1916, demolished) catered to fashionable vacationers.

Architectural historian Carl Condit called the big urban hotel "the original microcity," describing their intricate circulation and internal spatial arrangements. By the 1920s, when the Palmer House was constructed, hotels of this type had become very large and elaborate urban complexes containing not only grand reception lobbies and elaborate ballrooms, but also more utilitarian meeting rooms, barber shops and beauty salons, extensive retail outlets, and, in the case of the Palmer House, "a hospital and a radio broadcast station." Meant to serve both sophisticated travelers and weary businessmen, hotels such as the Palmer House could provide almost all needs under one roof. The elaborate vertical circulation needed for such hotels necessitated multiple banks of elevators, some serving just the ballrooms or other meeting rooms. Multi-storied lobbies like the Palmer House were common, and guests could take advantage of a plethora of dining facilities, from grand and swank spaces such as the Palmer House's Empire Room to simpler, more everyday restaurants, such as the Palmer House's basement Lunch Room.

Holabird and Roche, the architectural firm responsible for the design of the Palmer House Hotel, was well-known for finely-crafted and planned hotels. Prior to the Palmer House commission, they had built an addition to the Congress Hotel on Michigan Avenue, the Sherman House on Randolph at Clark (demolished), and the LaSalle Hotel on LaSalle Street (also demolished). Almost contemporary with the Palmer House are their designs for the Morrison Hotel Tower on Clark Street (demolished for the First National Bank of Chicago Building), and the Stevens Hotel (now Chicago Hilton and Towers) on Michigan Avenue.



From Chicago's beginnings as a frontier town, hotels have played an important economic and social role in the City's public life. Left: The Sauganash Inn was one of the fledgling settlement's first hotels. Middle left: The third Tremont House Hotel being destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871. It had been one of the City's most prominent in the 1850s and 60s; both Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas spoke from its balcony. Middle right: The rebuilt Tremont House; most hotel owners rebuilt their hotels on the same sites after the fire, including Palmer with his Palmer House.



The 20th century saw several new prominent hotels built in Chicago, including (left) the Blackstone Hotel on S. Michigan Ave., and (above) the Drake Hotel on N. Michigan Ave.

Holabird and Roche, the architectural firm that designed the Palmer House Hotel, also designed a number of other significant hotels in Chicago, including (right) the LaSalle Hotel on LaSalle St. (demolished), and (bottom) the Stevens Hotel (now Chicago Hilton and Towers) on S. Michigan Ave.



ARCHITECTS HOLABIRD AND ROCHE

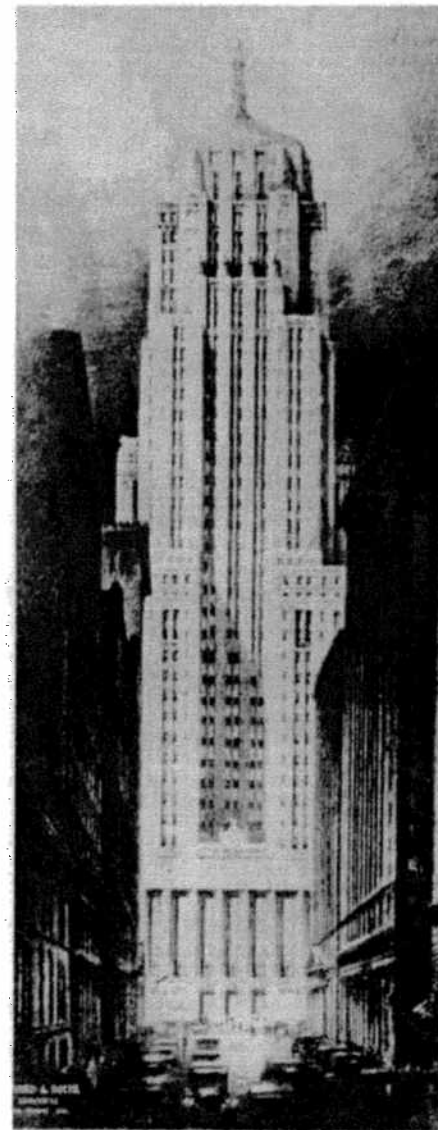
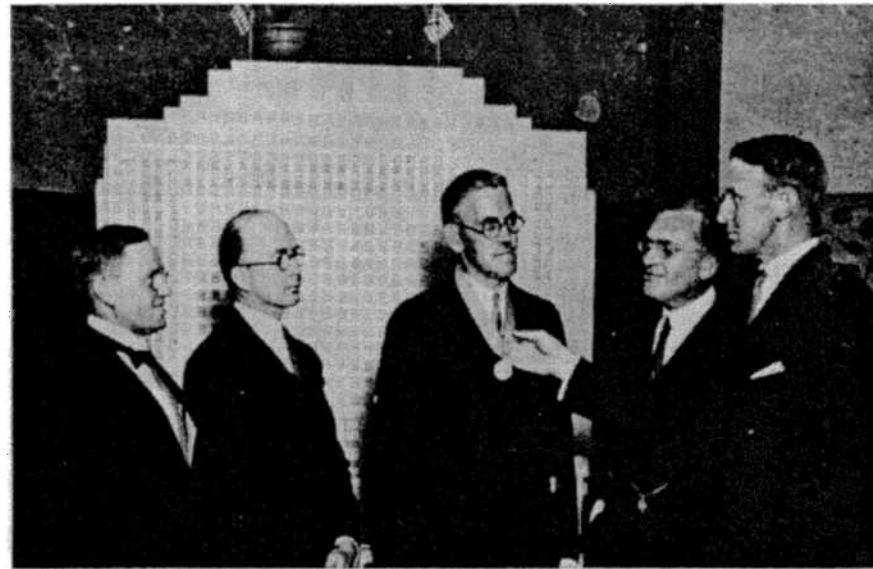
The architectural firm of Holabird and Roche, along with its successor firm Holabird and Root, is one of the most significant in Chicago history. Whether in their early work designing some of the most significant Chicago School buildings or later work such as the Palmer House or the Chicago Board of Trade, Holabird and Roche and Holabird and Root designed many of the City's most historically significant buildings.

Holabird and Roche was founded in 1880 as a partnership between William Holabird and Ossian C. Simonds, with Martin Roche becoming a partner in 1881. Two years later Simonds left to open his own landscape architecture office and the practice became known as Holabird and Roche. The firm survived under this name until 1927, when it became Holabird and Root, reflecting the partnership of John Holabird, the son of William, and John Wellborn Root, Jr., the son of famed Chicago architect John Wellborn Root, the partner of Daniel H. Burnham in the influential 19th-century firm of Burnham and Root.

Holabird and Roche, led by William Holabird and Martin Roche, first became known during the 1890s and early 1900s for their structurally expressive buildings such as the Marquette Building, the southern half of the Monadnock Building, the Chicago Building, and the Champlain Building (all Chicago Landmarks). These buildings are important examples of the Chicago style of architecture, which was a way of building that clearly expressed, through overall design, the modernity of the underlying steel-frame construction of buildings. The Chicago style, also known as the Chicago School, is significant in the history of world architecture and the development of modern architecture, and Holabird and Roche, along with Chicago architects William LeBaron Jenney and Louis Sullivan, are among the most important architectural firms associated with it.

Holabird and Roche, however, was one of Chicago's most prolific firms and designed many types and styles of buildings during the years between its founding in the 1880s and 1927, when its change of name to Holabird and Root signified a recognition of the firm's second-generation partners, John Holabird and John Wellborn Root, Jr. Like many ambitious architects-to-be, William Holabird's son had studied architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris in the early 1910s. While at the French academy, he met John Wellborn Root Jr., who was also advancing his architectural education there. Both returned to Chicago in 1914 to work in the offices of Holabird and Roche, where Holabird's first project was the Three Arts Club on N. Dearborn Ave. Military service in World War I took them away from the firm for awhile, but both returned in 1919. Soon after, they became partners and took over much of the responsibility for running the practice. Upon the death of Martin Roche in 1927, the firm changed its corporate name to Holabird and Root. The Palmer House Hotel was one of Holabird and Roche's major commissions as this new generation was taking over the practice.

The Palmer House Hotel, with its intricately arranged and finely executed plan wrapped in sophisticated French Neoclassical forms and details, exemplifies the early taste of John Holabird



Holabird and Roche, and their successor firm Holabird and Root, was one of Chicago's most significant firms. Top: The partners responsible for the Palmer House Hotel, John Holabird and John Wellborn Root, Jr., receiving an award for the firm's Chicago Daily News Building. Bottom left: Under the firm's original partners, William Holabird and Martin Roche, Holabird and Roche had designed seminal Chicago-style buildings such as the Marquette Building. Right: Under the younger Holabird and Root, the firm became known for their Art Deco-style skyscrapers such as the Chicago Board of Trade.

and John Wellborn Root, Jr. It reflects their rigorous Ecole training, which emphasized the importance of the plan as the starting point for all building design while also embracing historic architectural styles. Under their direction, Holabird and Roche used a similar method of design for the Steven Hotel (now the Chicago Hilton and Towers), also completed in 1927. Soon after changing the firm name to Holabird and Root, though, the firm embraced a change in architectural style, utilizing a distinctive type of sleek and visually sophisticated Art Deco for many of their later buildings, including the Palmolive Building and the Chicago Board of Trade (both Chicago Landmarks), as well as the Chicago Daily News Building (now 2 N. Riverside Plaza).

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sect 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a final recommendation of landmark designation to City Council for a building, structure, object or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Palmer House Hotel be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City's History

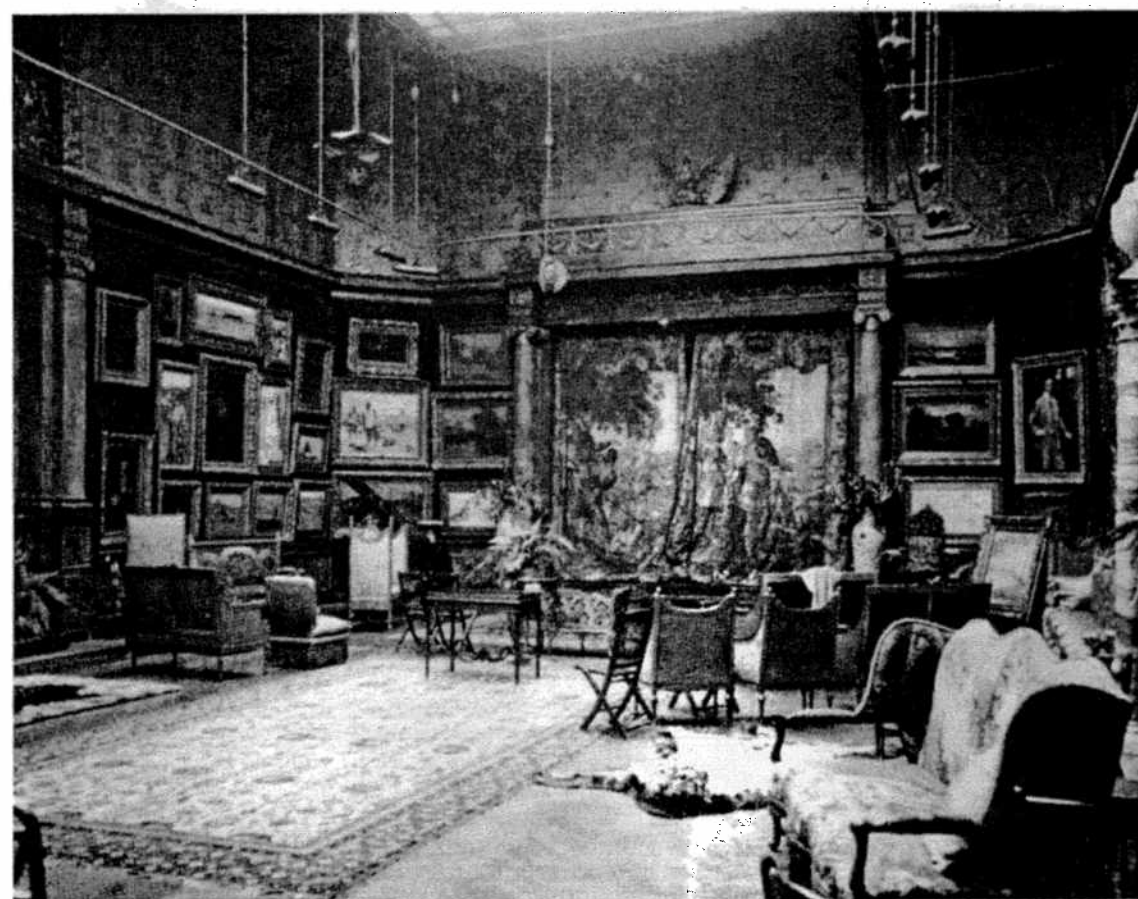
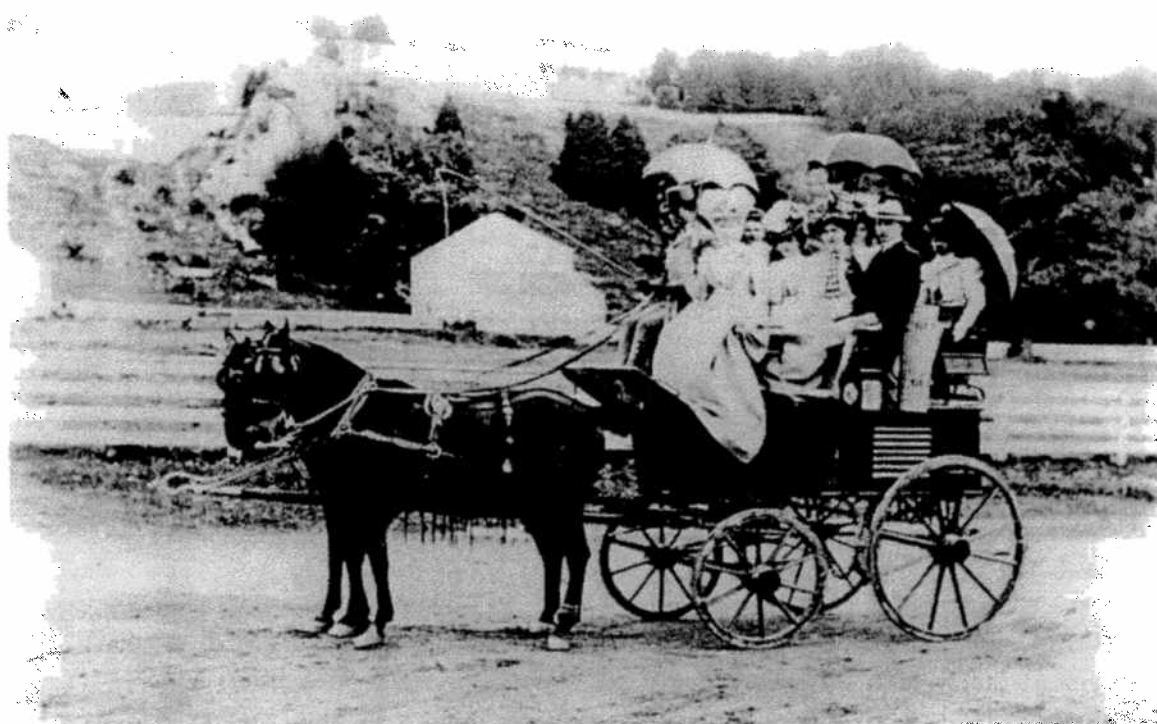
Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

- The Palmer House Hilton is a significant part of Chicago's history, being the fourth incarnation of the famous hostelry started in 1870 by Potter Palmer. Since 1871, the Palmer House has been an important Chicago institution, and the 1927 building remains a commanding presence on the southeast corner of State and Monroe in Chicago's Loop.

Criterion 3: Significant Person

Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

- The Palmer House Hotel is strongly associated with the founder of the hotel, Potter Palmer, who was one of Chicago's most significant businessmen and real-estate developers, and epitomizes the importance of the Palmer family to the history of Chicago.



Top: The Palmer family on vacation on Mackinaw Island, Michigan. Bottom: The picture gallery in the Palmer "castle." Through the advice of friend Mary Cassatt, a noted American painter living in Paris, Bertha acquired a fine collection of French Impressionist paintings that formed an important part of The Art Institute of Chicago's renowned collection.

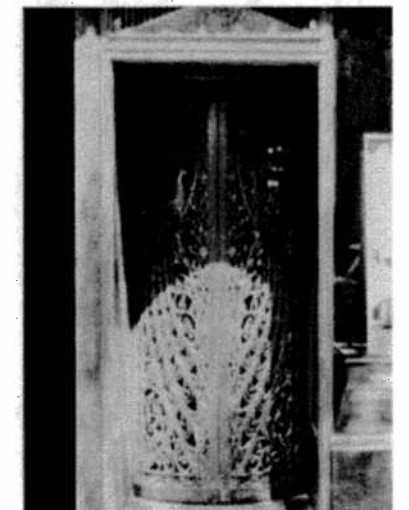
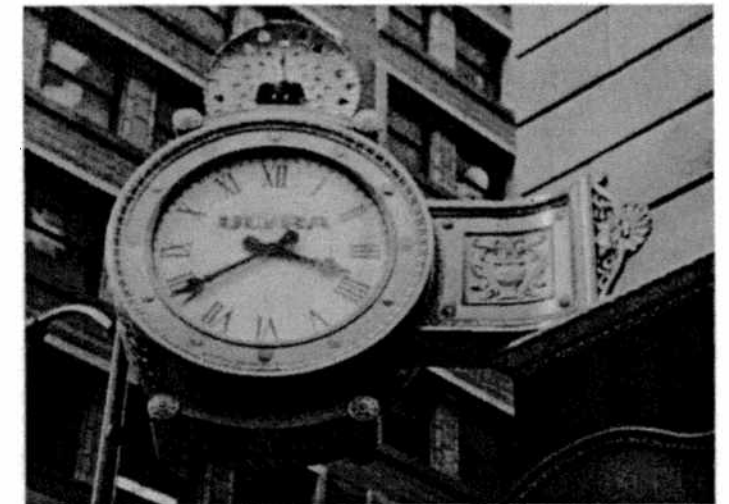
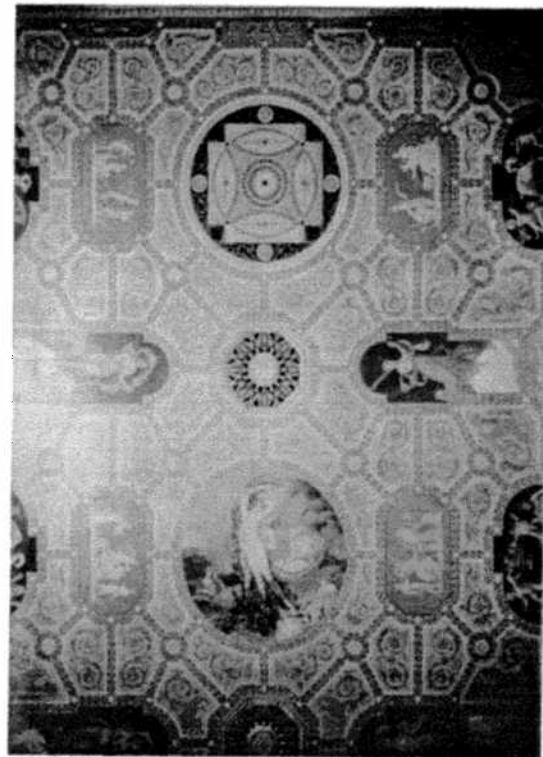
- Palmer's vision of State Street as Chicago's main retail street, and his role in its development as wide thoroughfare lined with elegant shops and commercial buildings, including the Palmer House Hotel, was a significant contribution to Chicago's economic, architectural, and social history.
- Through the construction of his own house on Lake Shore Drive and his development of stylish houses nearby, Palmer was an important figure in the development of the Gold Coast neighborhood on Chicago's Near North Side as the neighborhood of choice for Chicago's wealthy families.
- Palmer's wife, Bertha Honore Palmer, was an important social and business figure in Chicago in her own right, including the management of the Palmer Estate, including the Palmer House Hotel, between her husband's death in 1902 and her own in 1918.
- Palmer's sons, Honore Palmer and Potter Palmer, Jr., managed the Palmer Estate during the 1920s and commissioned the current Palmer House Hotel as a modern, up-to-date hotel in the tradition of their father's previous hotel buildings.

Criterion 4: Important Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship.

- The Palmer House Hotel is a fine example of Classical Revival-style architecture with French Neoclassical ornamentation.
- The hotel's exterior displays fine craftsmanship in brick and limestone, including pilasters, urns and other Classical-style ornament.
- The hotel retains a significant historic storefront and interior in the former C.D. Peacock jewelers store at the corner of State and Monroe, which retain lavish Classical Revival-style storefront surrounds in bronze and black marble, an elaborate peacock-bedecked corner clock, peacock-embellished bronze doors, and a handsomely interior space retaining green-marble walls and a coffered ceiling.
- The hotel retains significant interior spaces including its second-floor hotel reception lobby, Empire Room, Red Lacquer Room, and Grand Ballroom, all of which are detailed with finely-crafted Classical-style ornament and light fixtures.
- The Palmer House Hotel is a significant example of a large-scale urban hotel, a building type of great importance to Chicago history.

Historic views of the Palmer House Hotel's Monroe Street staircase (right), leading to the second-floor hotel reception lobby (bottom right). The two-story lobby has a remarkably-decorated ceiling (bottom left), ornamented with Classical-style mythological figures and details.



The Palmer House retains an exceptional historic storefront in the former C.D. Peacock Jewelers store (now Ultra Jewelers) on the corner of State and Monroe. Top left and right, middle left and right: Details of the black-and-bronze store exterior. Left: A historic photo of the store interior, which retains its historic green marble walls and coffered ceiling.

Criterion 5: Important Architect

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.

- The Palmer House Hotel is the work of Holabird and Roche, one of Chicago's most significant architectural firms.
- Under its original partners, William Holabird and Martin Roche, Holabird and Roche was an important architectural firm associated with the development and refinement of the Chicago style, a significant development in the history of world architecture.
- Holabird and Roche designed several buildings already designated as Chicago Landmarks, including the Chicago and Marquette buildings, and the southern half of the Monadnock Building.
- John Holabird and John Wellborn Root, Jr., second-generation partners of Holabird and Roche and the successor firm of Holabird and Root, are significant for their sophisticated and intricately planned buildings, whether Classical Revival designs such as the Palmer House or Art Deco skyscrapers such as the Chicago Board of Trade and Palmolive Building.

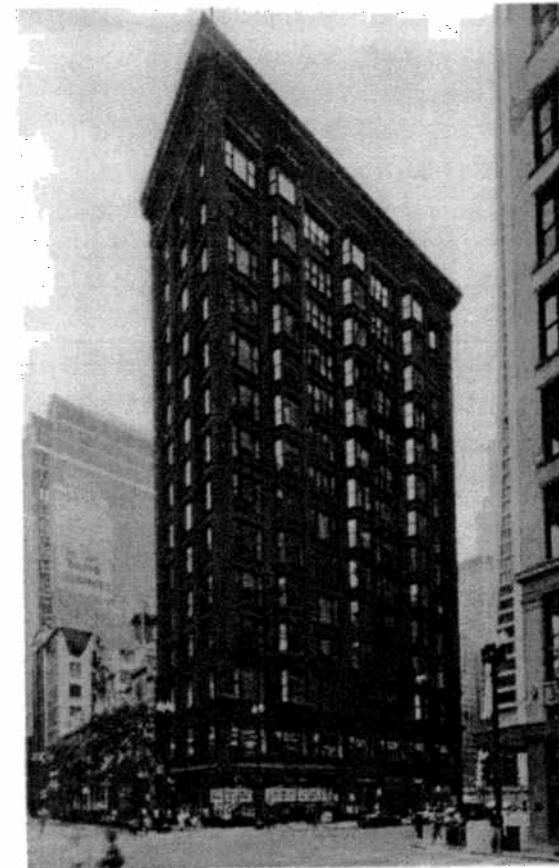
Integrity Criteria

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

The Palmer House Hotel retains excellent exterior physical integrity. It remains on its original site and its exterior walls and window openings remain largely intact. The hotel building retains most of its original decorative details, including limestone pilasters, urns and other Classical-style ornament. The former C.D. Peacock & Co. Jewelers storefront (now Ultra Jewelers) has most of its original integrity, retaining its historic black marble-and-bronze storefronts, bronze entrance doors, and peacock-ornamented corner clock. In addition, the interior of the former Peacock store retains original green marble walls and a coffered ceiling. The hotel's entrance canopies on State, Wabash, and Monroe retain Classical-style ornament.

A six-story limestone-clad addition to the Palmer House was built between 1928 and 1931 at 106-112 S. Wabash Ave.

The most significant exterior changes to the hotel building concern hotel entrances and storefronts on the first floor. The hotel entrances on State, Monroe, and Wabash have replacement doors and window glazing and frames. In addition, the Wabash entrance has had changes to its original configuration. Except for the C. D. Peacock storefront at State and



Holabird and Roche, and their successor firm Holabird and Root, designed some of the most important buildings in Chicago, including (top left) the Chicago Building, (top right) the Palmolive Building, and (left) the Chicago Daily News Building (now 2 North Riverside).

Monroe, the building's first-floor retail storefronts have been altered over time. Along Wabash, a few storefronts retain original black-and-bronze-colored storefront surrounds. Exterior changes also include upper-floor window replacement that is largely compatible with historic window sash configurations.

The interior of the Palmer House Hotel retains several noteworthy public spaces. These include the two-story reception lobby on the second floor and the Monroe Street staircase leading to it, the Empire Room also on the second floor, and the Red Lacquer Room and Grand Ballroom on the fourth floor.

The Monroe Street staircase leading both up to the second-floor reception lobby retains its original travertine marble walls and detailing. The reception lobby itself retains its stone walls, decorative ceiling, and lighting fixtures, including bronze torchieres and wall sconces. The circulation corridors around the lobby on the second floor and mezzanine also retain original features, including spatial relationships to the lobby and light fixtures. Changes to the lobby include the installation of escalators and retail display cabinets at the southern end of the lobby. The Empire Room retains its Classical Revival-style decoration, including decorative wall finishes and lighting fixtures. The Red Lacquer Room and Grand Ballroom also retain decorative painted plaster walls, cornices and ceiling details, as well as chandeliers and wall sconces.

The Monroe Street lobby has had some changes to materials and finishes, but retains many of these materials and finishes and its historic spatial volume. In addition, although secondary, the hotel's elevator lobbies on several public floors retain historic details, including decorative elevator doors and moldings. The fourth-floor corridor connecting the Red Lacquer Room and the Grand Ballroom also retain some historic details.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered the most important to preserve the historic and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its evaluation of the Palmer House Hotel, the Commission recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the Building;
- Lobby-level (second floor) interior spaces including the hotel reception lobby, circulation corridors surrounding the lobby and related staircases, the Empire Room, and the public elevator lobby;
- The Monroe Street (street-level) entrance lobby and staircase leading up to the hotel reception lobby;

- reception lobby;
- The mezzanine corridor overlooking the hotel reception lobby and its related public elevator lobby and staircases;
- The fourth-floor Grand Ballroom and Red Lacquer Room, their foyers, the public corridor linking the Grand Ballroom and Red Lacquer Room, and the public elevator lobby;
- The first-floor arcade; and
- The former C. D. Peacock and Co. Jewelers store interior at the corner of State and Monroe Street.

Significant features of the interiors listed above include, but are not limited to, historic finishes, light fixtures, materials, and ornamental detailing.

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From Lowe, *Chicago Interiors*: p. 5 (bottom), 28 (bottom).

From Brueggman, *Holabird and Roche, Holabird and Root: A Catalogue*: cover, pp. 7, 8, 26 (top & bottom right), 30, 31 (bottom), 33 (bottom).

From Jones Lang LaSalle brochure: p. 13 (top).

From Chicago Historical Society: pp. 13 (bottom), 14, 26 (bottom left), 28 (top), 33 (top right).

From Gilbert and Bryson, *Chicago and its Makers*: pp. 17, 19 (top), 23 (bottom left & right), 24.

From Mayer and Wade, *Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis*: p. 19 (bottom).

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